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THE RED CROSS

IN CHARGE OF

JANE A. DELANO, R.N.

Chairman of the National Committee on Red Cross Nursing Service

TOWN AND COUNTRY NURSING SERVICE¹

BY FANNIE F. CLEMENT, R.N.

For years to come the growth of the Town and Country Nursing Service will be regulated by the number of qualified nurses who stand ready to cast their lot with the small town and rural district. With no effort to bring publicity to such communities about this work, the numerous demands for our nurses cannot be filled. We must study hard as to how this universal need may be met, but let us also enthuse over the fact that there are even a few nurses possessed of the necessary courage and ability who already are "making good" in this new field.

What small communities sometimes expect of these visiting nurses is a challenge to the nursing profession which we would not have otherwise. To give you a little idea of the difficulties of the Town and Country Nursing Service in meeting this challenge, I shall quote verbatim one community's request, which might be humorous did regard of its precepts not mean success or failure of the local work.

Before every Red Cross visiting nurse is appointed where a preliminary visit to the community is not possible, a questionnaire is sent out including a query intended to help us in appointing a nurse who may as nearly as possible meet all expectations.

Question: What qualifications would you expect in your visiting nurse?

Answer: (1) A good mixer; (2) definitely Christian; (3) the rural social uplift viewpoint; (4) lecturing and organizing ability.

There not being room enough on the questionnaire to say all, a parenthetical sentence reads "See attached sheet." The attached sheet goes on to relate as to being "A good mixer:"—"She must be one on whom the conditions of life at its worst in a backward rural settlement would not grate too harshly. I mean one who could take these things as a matter of fact and tactfully instruct and lead instead of condemning." As to being "Definitely Christian:"—"This is a great religious county. Being able to say 'I belong to church' and to quote a few sentences from

¹ Read at an evening meeting of the Convention of the American Nurses, Association, held on May 1.

the Bible wins people's hearts immediately. The county is nearly all Baptist and very largely of the kind that would rather all the others were Baptists. In other words, it pays to be a Baptist, and if not that, then a Methodist, but must be a Protestant anyway."

As to the "Social uplift viewpoint:"—"We believe the greatest good is to be rendered in a service to the schools; holding mothers' meetings, sex talks to mothers and daughters; community domestic and personal hygiene, looking out for defects in eyes, ears, nose, teeth and throat, and pointing out same to teachers and parents; the care and preparation of food for the sick, some little bedside nursing, and the thousand and one things that will naturally arise."

According to law, the County School Boards of this State may appropriate money for an assistant County Superintendent of Education and such superintendent of education must hold at least a "third grade certificate." So this ability to pass "third grade" (which isn't much) must be added to the many other qualifications of our nurse.

Here are a few other requirements we not infrequently meet which I give, not to discourage, but to make nurses aspire:—A normal school or college degree, three years hospital training, social service and public health training, ability to teach physical culture, and folk dances, to lecture and give health courses in school, hold classes in domestic science, ride a horse, run an automobile, speak best of English and have some knowledge of three or four other languages, a knowledge of farming, familiarity with local laws, legal procedure, journalism, and public speaking, and in order that she may be adaptable to new conditions and easy to get along with, not over thirty years of age.

A member of a small community committee writes as follows:

"When we had our last annual 'Town Cleanup,' it was the trained nurse who had most influence in getting the foreigners to clean out cellars and back yards. It was she who gathered together a squad of men and led them to an open lot which sadly needed cleaning. When they were through and filed home at 5 o'clock, shovels over their shoulders, they said 'Good-bye, Missus, we like woman section boss.'" I could tell many ways in which the nurse becomes identified with the whole life of her community, but I shall refrain from any more, except one, which from a small and humorous beginning led to an important climax.

A Slavish woman was trying to raise some geese. They had hatched too early, and it was only with vigilant care that she succeeded in keeping five of them alive. Early in their history one broke its wings. It was a matter of great amusement among our workers when we learned that the nurse had been sent for and had set and bound the wings to cardboard. But they grew to be perfectly good wings, and we had almost forgotten Minnie and her geese, when one day the nurse met

Minnie coming down the road weeping, followed by three bright geese. It was with difficulty that the story was learned. Some workmen from the construction works just across the creek from Minnie's house had taken the geese at night and painted them. The nurse and Minnie and the green geese and the policeman went to the Justice of the Peace. The result was that the workmen paid five dollars apiece for the geese, including two that died, lost their jobs and had to leave the town. These may seem like drastic measures, but the geese were being raised for market, and meant good money. If the men had escaped to enjoy their joke, the many foreigners living in the section adjacent to the new plant would have been victims to further practical jokes. As it was, this was the only one attempted.

During the recent baby week campaign, effort was made by one of the nurses to assemble all the children to a big meeting at the Neighborhood House. Of the 200 children present, 174 turned in essays on "The Care of the Baby," to the nurse during the following week. Two of the ten children receiving prizes for their essays were boys. One little fellow, when he learned he must read his essay from the platform, ran out of the door, and as the nurse says "is probably still running." From the children's essays, much valuable information has been collected and I pass this on to you. "Don't rock the baby as it will toss its brains." "Rocking is not good for it, it makes them sick and stiff." "Bad habits are easily made by the mothers, and the baby gets wise to it." "Don't let the baby suck its thumb for there might be a fly on it, and it would get the disease of the fly." "If you give the baby alcohol, it would lose one-half pound every year, and would become drunk when he is old." "Never lift it up by the arms, because it will place them out of place. Never, never, never, pick up the baby by the arms whatever."

Then as to the obligations of Society: "The Public owes the baby as follows: Pure air and sunshine. Pure, cool, fresh, free, flowing air at night. Its own private bed, sufficient covering of fluffy, porous materials, and the chance to be a perfect man or woman."

Verily there still remains need for the visiting nurse in this community!

Through coöperation of the teachers, the school children in many communities write essays on "Care of the teeth" or other health topics and I wish there were time to follow up the results of such health instruction into the far away rural homes. In one instance, a complaining mother remarked—"She now gets no good of the sink."

One sixth grade pupil in a rural school, after describing the composition of the teeth summarizes in the last paragraph of his essay, as follows:

"If the people would wash their teeth, they would not be so sick. When little babies receive their first tooth their mothers should take a cloth and put it on her finger and dip it into some warm water and soda, and wash the baby's tooth. When the baby receives the second tooth, the mother should get a small fine tooth-brush, and wash the teeth. When we are little we have twenty teeth and when we grow older we have thirty-two teeth. Every time we pull a tooth, it takes off a year of our life."

The following episode, of a different nature, shows how sometimes a hard experience of the visiting nurse may have a happy outcome. "Christmas night, I was invited out to dinner at a friend's house. There came a call to a confinement case and none of the doctors would go, and the midwife was sick, so I spent the night in the wretchedest part of the town, the baby being born at 6 a.m. I came home in the worst squall I was ever out in. The wind knocked me over, and it froze one cheek. Am really glad it happened as it made me mad and brought publicity to the fact that we have not enough medical attention. It has been arranged now that I go to the powers that be and tell about conditions here, and as my ire is aroused, I will not be afraid to tell all, as it will result in good for the town." Such was the result, for steps have already been taken to provide more adequate hospital facilities and medical care.

I could tell you the story of a southern mountain nurse, of her days' travel of twenty-four miles, on horseback, to visit nine patients up the creek or down the cove, into cabins where for days and weeks she is the sole visitor, where the people are kind and hospitable, and anxious to learn, where she says, "Everything is so different to any place I have ever been in. I feel helpless and inefficient even though I am so interested in the people and realize more each day what this work might mean to them."

I could give in detail, the report of a Red Cross Visiting nurse in a community of 1000 population, largely foreign, among which last year she made 6075 visits, besides doing 846 office dressings. Over half the number of visits were at the bedside and 400 of the balance were school nursing visits. This record it seems to me is exceptional. She has an automobile and every contrivance provided to make her work effective, yet what would this avail if back of it all, there did not lurk a most earnest purpose, a deep spirit of service as is that typified by our great National Red Cross in its endeavor through the medium of the visiting nurse, to alleviate suffering and promote genuine happiness in the homes of our rural people.

Will not the nurses of our country do their part in heeding the call for the many to share the lot of the few now consecrated to this service?